

UTILIZATION PROJECT REPORT

November 2017

Voice & Vision, Inc. was commissioned by Chester County Department of Human Services and Community Care Behavioral Health to gather data on why some mental health and drug and alcohol services were being used less by people on medical assistance who are Black/African American than people who are White/Caucasian on medical assistance. To advise and help implement the project, Voice & Vision formed a Core Advisory Group representative of Black/African Americans who have used services, Kindergarten-12th grade educators, college professors, treatment providers, faith leaders, family members, and advocates. The Core Advisory Group developed the following Recovery Support Vision:

In Chester County, we offer comprehensive support and services to improve the lives of Black and African Americans needing mental health and substance abuse help by building trusting relationships, providing education, and empowering county residents to reach their full potential.

THE PROCESS



Core Advisory Group formed in 2016



Core Advisory Group developed their Recovery Support Vision



Core Advisory Group and Voice and Vision conducted interviews with 38 community leaders, school employees, professionals, and judicial/government employees



The Core Advisory Group reviewed the results, developed priorities, and identified recommendations.



The results and recommendations were presented to leaders from Community Care Behavioral Health and County Departments of Human Services, Mental Health, and Drug & Alcohol who responded with action points.



Phase 2 of the project began in October 2017.

THE RESULTS

The top themes below represent the feedback from the 38 people interviewed and the Core Advisory Group on what is needed to help individuals and families who are Black/African American use mental health and/or substance abuse services. NOTE: For those things that are already occurring in Chester County, expanding each throughout the County was recommended.

Access: to information, help and services

Advocacy, Education, Awareness: about mental illnesses, addictions, recovery, treatment, services, and supports in the community

Collaboration: all addressing needs: community organizations, educators, County departments, justice system, treatment providers, faith-based groups, and individuals and families themselves

Community Support: more community groups and agencies with commitment and compassion to assist with basic needs and as a connection or starting point for people to get the help they need

Cultural Competence: training of staff working at agencies and people serving in the community

Supports and Services: more services and community supports available at conducive times and places

Priority Recommendations and Next Steps Phase 1

The Core Advisory Group met and identified the following **priority recommendations**:



❖ Enhance collaboration...

- Between groups in the community, agencies, County services/systems, schools, justice system, and the individuals and families to increase the use of mental health and substance abuse services by Black/African Americans in need
- Between key players by bringing all relevant people, services, and groups together to:
 - ◊ help meet individuals and families needs as well as to help with multiple, high-intensity issues
 - ◊ help advance the Core Group's Recovery Support Vision, which is:

In Chester County, we offer comprehensive support and services to improve the lives of Black and African Americans needing mental health and substance abuse help by building trusting relationships, providing education, and empowering county residents to reach their full potential.

❖ Improve Cultural Competence within services

- Increase the number of Black/African Americans working in services, on committees, and as policy makers
- Train staff working in agencies and services on cultural competence to:
 - ◊ improve their cultural understanding of Black/African American individuals and families and of the town and/or community in which the staff works
 - ◊ build awareness of the barriers individuals and families face to receiving help
 - ◊ cultivate trusting relationships and engage individuals and families before and during treatment

❖ Improve knowledge of mental health and substance abuse and create awareness and acceptance

- Disseminate information on treatment, services, support groups, and recovery efforts at the places Black/African Americans say they go for support—churches were highlighted often as well as sports clubs, schools, other families, and shelters
- Train provider and outreach staff on substance abuse, mental illness, recovery, and holistic treatment

As a first step to address the specific priorities, Chester County Departments of Human Services, Mental Health, and Drug & Alcohol and their managed care partner, Community Care Behavioral Health, identified two key areas for which projects have been funded to begin in 2018:

1. **Cultivate dialogue** with churches and faith-based groups heavily attended by Black/African American individuals and families to increase communication, build relationships, identify needs, share resources and develop a partnership to pave the way for better awareness of and access to mental health and substance abuse services.
2. **Expand training** to Chester County's mental health and drug and alcohol service providers to help them better understand cultural and community issues specific to Black/African American individuals and families.



Collaboration will be addressed as we all partner in helping our neighbors and communities acquire the hope, support, information, and assistance needed to address mental illness, addictions, recovery, and resiliency, so people can and do reach their full potential!